

When God Changed a City

Pastor Hugh Whitfield Aug. 17, 2025 Pearl Baptist Church
Jonah 3

Jonah 3:1-10

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.” ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days’ walk. ⁴ Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

⁵ Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. ⁶ When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. ⁷ He issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. ⁸ But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.”

¹⁰ When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it*.

- A. I love looking at people in the Bible whose lives were dramatically changed when they had an encounter with God.

And if there is any lesson God wants you to learn from the Bible it is this:

Once you have a personal encounter with God, your life will be forever changed....

...to the point people will be saying, “Wow, what a change!”

They said that about Jacob, David, Moses, King Nebuchadnezzar, and they will say that about YOU!

- A. Today, we are going to say, “What a change” about the people of Nineveh; and not just some of the people, but ALL the people of Nineveh.

And I want to share with you what brought such amazing change.

Nineveh’s change started with:

1. The Preacher of God

Jonah 3:1-3

¹Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it

the message that I tell you.”³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

- A. What would you say is one of God's greatest means for reaching people, reviving people, awakening people, and saving people? Answer: preachers and the preaching of the Word of God.

And on this occasion God chose a reluctant, run-away prophet by the name of Jonah.

- B. Most everyone in the room is familiar with Jonah. He's famous for being swallowed by what? Whale (big fish)

All because he refused God's directive to go to Nineveh. And Jonah thought he had good reason!

Picture of Ninevites impaling their victims

Because the Ninevites were the most ruthless murderers on the planet.

And they particularly HATED Jonah and his people – the Jews.

In fact, they were known for killing them in cold blood, fileting them, and impaling their bodies on a stake and letting them rot.

How many of you would have jumped at the chance to preach to the Ninevites?

- C. So Jonah ran from God, but God ran after Jonah – and literally ran him down with a big fish.

How many of you know that you can run from God, and if you are His, you won't run far?

Some of you are right now running from God.

For 3 days Jonah was fish food in the belly of this big fish. And while he could have died, he didn't.

BTW: If you are skeptical of someone surviving being swallowed by a whale, then consider this:

PICTURE of Whale and M. Packard

On June 11, 2021, Michael Packard, a commercial lobster diver in Cape Cod, MA, was on his second dive of the day when he was swallowed by a humpback whale.

The 56-year-old veteran diver was inside of the whale's mouth for between 30 to 40 seconds before the whale breached, shook its head and spit Packard out.

- D. Jonah didn't die. But God did get his attention.

Sometimes God puts us in a near-death experience to get our attention.

How many of you have come to the threshold of death, and you knew God was using it to get your attention.

- E. Well, God certainly got Jonah's attention.
And for 3 days he cried out to God to save him and forgive him and probably said, "but I'm not going to Nineveh."

And God said, "Fine, stay another day suffering in your whale."

And finally on the third day, Jonah cried, "Uncle," "I give up." "I'll go to Nineveh."

And I love what God did next; it's found in the last verse of Jonah 2:

Jonah 2:10

¹⁰ So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

I don't see Jonah being shot out like a tomahawk missile.
I see it like our cat, Oden.
Have you ever watched a cat vomit?

PICTURE (Jonah spit out)

That's how I imagine Jonah was vomited onto the beach.

- F. And then listen to what the Bible says in Jonah 2:
¹ Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

Look at Jonah's response:

³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

- G. Let me tell you what happened to Jonah:

He's no longer cautious. He's confident.
He's no longer fearful. He's fearless.
He's no longer a coward. He's courageous.

Can I tell you what really happened to Jonah?

**HE HAD A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH GOD
AND IT CHANGED HIS LIFE.**

- H. The people God uses to reach people, revive people, awaken people, and save people are people whose lives have been changed by God.

It's true!

God can use a nobody to tell everybody about Jesus.

And we are all NOBODIES.

But the NOBODIES God uses are those who have been changed by God.

- I. Can I tell you what is needed from the preachers of America?

We don't need ELOQUENCE!
We don't need INTELLIGENCE!
We certainly don't need ELEGANCE!

But we do need preachers who have had a personal encounter with God and have been changed to the glory of God.

- J. People are not drawn to God by how much you know, but by WHO you know.

And the more it's evident that Jesus is living in you, the more people will want what you've got!

And that's not a message just for the preachers.
That's a message for all the members.

- K. God's given us the power to literally reach this entire county for the glory of God.

School
Ballgame
Job
Office
Neighborhood
Home

You don't need a slick sales job.
You don't need a slick tract.
You don't need a slick Christian T-shirt.
You don't even need to be slick.

You just need a personal encounter with God that changed your life.

And if your life has been changed by God, you can't hide it!!

- L. Jonah certainly couldn't hide his change.

Jonah 3:3-4

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. ⁴ And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

- Great in population (over 600,000 people)
- Great in property (60 miles in diameter)

- M. There were 2 dead-giveaways that convinced the Ninevites that Jonah was a man of God.

1) The first was his MAKE-UP.

He just spent 3 day and nights in a fish!
Scientists say the gastric juices from the fish would
bleach Jonah's skin completely white with yellow spots;
and remove every inch of hair

So, when these Ninevites, these dark-skinned
Ninevites, saw this bald-head, white-skinned, yellow
polka dotted Israelite...

They knew, he's not from around here.
In fact, he is not FROM this world. He's OUT OF this
world.

Can people tell that you are not from here?
Do people know this world is not your home?
Can people see you're different?
You're not like the people in this world!
You walk differently, talk differently, act differently,
think differently, live differently.

When you have a personal encounter with God, you'll
be different.
And that will certainly get people's attention.

2) The second was his MESSAGE.

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Only 8 words in English.
Only 5 words in Hebrew.

And yet, what Jonah preached was not a
Sermonette! To Christianettes smoking cigarettes
playing Russian roulette on an Airforce jet.

Jonah was preaching the Word of the Lord.
He was saying what the Lord told him to say!

When is the last time you delivered God's mail to
someone? That is, you delivered a word from the Lord
to them.

John 3:16
Phil 4:13
Rom. 10:9

N. Here's the point:

When your life has been changed by Jesus, people will
see it by the way you live for Jesus;
And they will hear it by the way you speak for Jesus.

Jonah 3:5

⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God

What brought a change to the entire population of Nineveh?
The Preacher of God

2. Getting Right with God

⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. ⁶ Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. ⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

- A. Let me share with you what was very apparent.
All Nineveh heard the word from Jonah.

And they all got right with God.

How do we know when you are right with God? Evidence:

1) Conviction

- a) Jonah preached the judgment of God.
40 days and you're toast.
And they knew why?
Jonah didn't have to tell them.

Deep inside, they knew their sin!

You see, God has put his law in our hearts.
You don't have to tell a murderer that murdering is wrong.
You don't have to tell a thief stealing is wrong.
You don't have to tell an adulterer that adultery is wrong.
(That's not to say don't preach on sin)

Sin is already wired in people's conscience.

And you can suppress the truth about your sin.
You can even become calloused about your sin.
But that doesn't change the fact that you sin.

- b) And when your sin is confronted by holy, holy, holy God, and you realize you have to answer to holy God, you don't become calloused, you get convicted.

You're going to stand before God one day.
Either GUILTY
Or FORGIVEN

- c) And these Ninevites knew they were guilty and deserving of God's judgment.

2) Contrition

- a) They showed their GREAT sorrow for their sins.
Sackcloth – outward sign of grief/mourning
Ashes – sign of ruin
- b) These Ninevites had gotten caught with their hands in the cookie jar (knife in somebody's back) and they realize that knife should be in theirs.

And they are pouring out crocodile tears, not just for sinning against others, but sinning against holy God.

This is how you know you are on your way to get right with God. You have GREAT sorrow for the sins you have committed on earth, but you have GREATER sorrow for the sins you have committed against God in Heaven.

- c) At the end of the day, you realize you will answer to Almighty God.
He brought us into this world, and He can certainly take us out.

3) Confession

- a) Notice what the King orders:
Jonah 3:8 (NAS)
8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.

- b) He tells them to own up to their sins.
In other words, confess!

Confession = saying the same thing God says about your actions.

And their violence was wicked; offensive to God.

- c) How do you label your actions?
Do you justify them?
Do you sweep them under the carpet?
Or do you admit to God what you did is wicked and offensive to God and you're sorry for your sin.
- d) The Ninevites were no slackers when it came to confessing their sins to God.

And the king was praying this was enough to turn away God's judgment:

Jonah 3:9

⁹ Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

3. The Mercy of God

¹⁰ Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Formula:

The preacher of God + getting right with God = the mercy of God.

A. God was moved by their heart of repentance.

He's moved by anyone who repents.

Repentance = basic meaning = go in the opposite direction.

To go in not just another direction, but go in God's direction.

B. Repentance doesn't mean "admit it and quit it."
It doesn't mean you simply stop doing the bad things.
It means you start doing the right things/the God things.

You don't just stop hating someone. You show love to that someone.

You don't just stop spreading gossip about someone. You start speaking well about that someone.

C. And when God sees your heart to do as Jesus did, to live as Jesus lived, He pours out His mercy and grace on you and me.

And boy did God pour out His mercy and grace on Nineveh.

600+K Ninevites got saved! 600K Ninevites were miraculous changed!

It was the greatest revival in the OT!

Conclusion:

And what I believe is that God can do it again.

But, it's going to take:

- 1) The Preaching of God
- 2) People willing to Get Right with God.
- 3) Which will bring the Mercy of God.

How many of you would love to see everyone in your school, workplace, neighborhood, Lincoln County, Gaston County CHANGED!

Friend, it starts with you!

Have you been changed?